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LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4025

THE STATE CAPITOL

HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

July, 2004

Dear Neighbor,

I am glad to report that, despite the difficult circumstances that faced the General Assembly this year, the 2004 legislative session was both productive and successful.

Most importantly, on a bipartisan basis, the Assembly passed a state budget that:

- Restores millions of dollars in funding for primary and secondary education;
- Repairs most of the damage that last year's budget would have inflicted on Medicaid, ConnPACE, HUSKY, and other healthcare programs; and
- Rejects increases in nuisance and sin taxes that Governor Rowland had proposed.

In addition to passing a sensible state budget, the legislature tackled a number of other key issues. We enacted legislation allowing towns like West Hartford to delay property tax revaluations, saving homeowners from a sharp tax spike. We passed landmark legislation requiring cars sold in Connecticut to adhere to higher emission standards, as California, New York, and New Jersey already do. We enacted a new law that will help hospitals to reduce error rates and improve the quality of care available in Connecticut. I have included further details on the state budget and these other matters in this newsletter.

In addition, I feel it is important for me to share with you my thoughts on the scandals that engulfed the Governor's office this year:

This has been a strange time to serve in government. I called for Governor Rowland to resign shortly after he admitted lying to the public and accepting totally inappropriate, illegal gifts from state contractors and subordinates. When the Governor showed he had no intention of accepting responsibility for his actions, I strongly supported commencement of a legislative inquiry into his actions. By the time this newsletter is printed and mailed, Governor Rowland will have resigned.

Like most of you, I look forward to new leadership in state government. In the executive branch, and in both chambers of the

assembly, new individuals are taking charge. And it is clear that there will be a new tone – with special emphasis on restoring public trust.

In that context, I wanted to let you know that anyone who says, “all politicians are corrupt” does not know the people with whom I serve. I greatly respect and admire my colleagues in the General Assembly – Republicans and Democrats alike. The overwhelming majority of public officials whom I know adhere to the highest standards of conduct.

For those of us in the Assembly – as for most residents of Connecticut – the crisis brought on by the unethical conduct of the Governor and his associates has been a difficult one. Given our state's long tradition of efficient, ethical governance, the daily revelations of questionable behavior were both upsetting and embarrassing.

Please know that, as a member of the House, I take very seriously my responsibility to strengthen state laws regarding ethics, contracting and campaign finances. I am proud that, this spring, we strengthened the state ethics code, lengthening the statute of limitations and increasing fines. If I am fortunate enough to return to the House next year, I will seek additional reforms – with campaign finance reform my top priority.

I hope that this note and the articles that follow address your concerns. If you have additional questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at the phone number, address or email address provided with this update.

Thank you to those of you who chose to contact me by phone, email, fax or mail to let me know of your concerns this year. Please know that I take your thoughts and perspectives into account as I weigh matters that come before the House.

Thank you again. Best wishes for a happy, healthy summer.

Sincerely,

Andrew Fleischmann
State Representative

The State Budget – Lower Taxes and Improved Services

This year, the General Assembly ratified a budget on an overwhelming, bipartisan basis. With more than two-thirds of legislators in both chambers supporting the budget act, the Governor had little choice but to sign the measure.

It was easier to pass a budget this year because, with the economy improving, revenues surpassed early projections. This circumstance allowed us to restore key programs and increase the property tax credit on the state income tax.

Specifically, the legislature increased the maximum property tax credit against the personal income tax from \$350 to \$500 for income years starting on or after January 1, 2005.

Program restorations included:

- \$88.2 million additional in grants to cities and towns. West Hartford received \$1.86 million additional overall, with \$1.79 million more in Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funds.
- \$4.6 million to reduce the number of people on the Department of Mental Retardation's (DMR) waiting list for residential support and services.
- \$5 million for private human service providers operating under contracts with DMR and the departments of Children and Families, Mental Health and Addiction Services and other state agencies.
- \$14.25 million to repeal the Medicaid co-payments required last year and \$17.69 million to eliminate proposed premiums for Medicaid and restore the basic benefit package. Analysts estimate that more than 80,000 Connecticut children will retain their health coverage thanks to these changes.
- \$1.25 million to eliminate the ConnPACE asset test and estate recovery requirements.
- \$25.3 (from the FY 2003-04 surplus) for the Higher Education State Matching Grant program.
- \$1 million in financial aid for students at the state's public and private colleges and universities.
- \$13.4 million to enhance justice and prisoner recidivism reduction efforts, including funding for more drug treatment and halfway house beds and probation officers. Experts testifying before the General Assembly indicated that these investments could save taxpayers as much as \$100 million in prison costs in the coming years.
- \$3.4 million to increase the number of state troopers serving Connecticut.

The budget also anticipates saving an additional \$12.5 million by expanding the preferred drug list in the Medicaid, ConnPACE, and State Administered General Assistance programs (SAGA).

In short, this budget restores critical programs while increasing the size of the property tax credit on the state income tax. It is a budget that Connecticut residents in general – and West Hartford residents in particular – can be proud of. (HB 5692)



Helping Veterans



Mental Health Services for Active Duty Reservists

The General Assembly passed a new law this spring to provide mental health services for active duty reservists returning from service in Iraq. The law also makes these services available to reservists' dependents. Given the extreme stresses of war that these individuals and their families face for our sakes, providing such services seems the least we can do. (PA 04-258)

Renovations for the Veterans' Home

The legislature approved \$15 million in state bonding to renovate and improve the Veterans' Home in Rocky Hill.

The project includes construction of a new 250-bed nursing home and upgrades to existing structures. The federal government is expected to allocate an additional \$50 million to complete the project.

Given the run-down nature of the facility and the debt we owe our veterans, I am proud to have supported this initiative.

The Clean Car Law

Reducing Air Pollution and Promoting Public Health

The General Assembly continues to make progress in improving Connecticut's air quality. With the passage of this year's "clean car law" – which I cosponsored and strongly advocated – Connecticut joins California, New York and New Jersey in imposing tougher auto emissions standards.

This new law will reduce the volume of harmful air pollutants by as much as one third, making Connecticut a cleaner, healthier place to live. Beginning with the 2008 model year, a manufacturer's fleet must meet stricter average emissions standards for both gasoline and diesel vehicles. The new emissions standards also include a provision requiring 10% of a manufacturer's fleet to be comprised of zero-emission vehicles or their equivalent. Finally, the law imposes additional evaporative emissions controls on vehicles' fuel tanks and exhaust systems.

The net result will be a reduction in both toxic and particulate emissions. Children and adults in Connecticut suffering from pulmonary disease, emphysema and asthma will benefit. And those without such ailments will be less likely to develop them. (PA 04-84)

Assembly Approves Quality Of Care Bill

New Law Creates New Reporting Requirements And Information Sharing To Facilitate Error Reduction And Improve The Quality of Health Care

This spring the House and Senate overwhelming passed An Act Concerning the Quality of Health Care, a measure I coauthored and cosponsored. The bill is designed to reduce medical errors, increase sharing of best practices among hospitals, and further improve quality of care and health outcomes in Connecticut.

Two years ago the General Assembly passed legislation I cosponsored that required the reporting of medical errors, established a quality of care advisory committee in the Department of Public Health, and established a report on comparative quality of care in Connecticut hospitals.

This new legislation, which passed by a vote of 145 to 2 in the House and unanimously in the Senate, expands that law by requiring that all adverse event reports conform to the National Quality Forum list of reportable errors. Using this list will enable standardized data collection and comparison, both within Connecticut and across states. It will also make patient safety issues more easily identifiable – and encourage hospitals to work together to address joint issues.

The bill changes the timing for reporting, requiring a report within seven days for a description with initial corrective action steps, and thirty days for a more comprehensive report detailing root causes and a complete corrective action plan. (PA 04-164)



Strengthening the ConnPACE Program

Last year the legislature approved a budget – which I opposed – that included major cuts to programs helping lower income citizens and seniors. One program sustaining such cuts was ConnPACE, which subsidizes prescription drugs for senior citizens who meet the program's income requirements.

Last year's budget included both an asset test and an estate recovery provision for ConnPACE participants. The asset test further limited the number of seniors who would qualify for the program. And the estate recovery plan led many seniors to quit ConnPACE, fearing that, upon their passing, they would no longer be able to bequeath their holdings to their children and grandchildren.

Given these problems, I am happy to report that, this spring, the legislature eliminated both the asset test and the estate recovery provision from the ConnPACE program. (HB 5689)

The high cost of prescription drugs and multiple prescriptions mean that it can cost hundreds of dollars per month for a senior to obtain the medications he or she needs to stay healthy. Many seniors could not afford to take the medications prescribed by their doctors without the help of the ConnPACE program. Thanks to this year's legislation, thousands of Connecticut seniors will be able to continue participating in this program – and continue taking the prescription drugs they need to stay healthy.



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The Neighborhood Update

This Issue Includes:

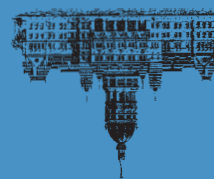
- New State Budget Information
- The Latest On State Health Care Programs
- An Update On Environmental Protection

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Legislative Briefs

Toughening Penalties for Repeat Drunken Drivers – Making Our Roads Safer

The state legislature took strong steps this year in response to drunk driving fatalities and abuses. Under a new law passed this spring, individuals convicted of driving under the influence – whether drugs or alcohol – will face stiffer penalties and higher administrative fees if they cause a fatality or have a prior DWI conviction within the preceding ten years. In addition to any other penalties, convicted individuals will pay an increased fine of \$125 for the restoration of their license after suspension. They will also be required to attend either a substance abuse treatment or alcohol intervention program as well as an alcohol education program.

Given that the most dangerous impaired drivers tend to be repeat offenders, this new law represents an important step in the effort to get them to change their ways or lose their right to drive. For every passenger and pedestrian in Connecticut, that will mean increased safety. (PA 04-250)

Assistance with Textbook Purchases

Required textbooks represent a considerable portion of any college student's budget. New legislation the assembly passed this spring requires the state university system and the Commissioner of Higher Education to examine ways to provide text-

books at reasonable cost.

Methods for controlling costs may include: (1) providing faculty members with information about textbook costs prior to the design of syllabi for their courses; (2) encouraging stores to sell textbooks separately from other products recommended by publishers; (3) utilizing on-line, used or older edition textbooks without sacrificing educational content; and (4) ensuring students are informed about alternative ways to purchase textbooks at reduced cost. (SA 04-3)

Limits on Mandatory Overtime for Nurses

The General Assembly has made it a priority to protect those who protect us. This principle includes Connecticut nurses, who often must endure both stressful conditions and long hours. In an effort to ease the pressure, the legislature enacted a law I supported that allows registered and licensed practical nurses and aides to decline overtime unless informed of it 48 hours prior to their scheduled work shift, except under special conditions. The law also makes it illegal for employers to penalize nurses for refusal of an overtime request. The net result will be nurses who are less overworked, more awake, and better able to care for their patients. (PA 04-242)